

LAUSD board averts a budget massacre

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Advocates for the Los Angeles Unified School District's adult-education and early-childhood programs demonstrate outside of LAUSD headquarters in downtown Los Angeles in advance of a school board vote that could gut both programs. (Hans Gutknecht/Staff Photographer)

Averting what some feared would be a Valentine's Day massacre, the Los Angeles Unified board decided Tuesday to delay making crippling cuts to adult education and arts and preschool programs in the hope of finding money to fund them. | [See photo gallery.](#) | [Watch video.](#)

After hearing adult-ed success stories from a parade of speakers, board member Steve Zimmer introduced what he called "an amendment of hope" that gives officials a month to either find additional funding sources or other programs to cut. Zimmer said there is no way to salvage every program, but he hopes to be able to make "drastic" rather than "catastrophic" cuts.

"Our school families have endured so much that

could come back from," Zimmer said after the meeting. "These cuts would have been unconscionable. I had to craft a way to give us more space and time to ensure we've exhausted every option.

"The battle for public education now shifts from the board room to the negotiation table and the ballot box."

The board had been set to consider a plan that would close a \$550 million deficit in its \$6 billion budget by gutting vocational and adult education, early-childhood and after-school, and elementary arts programs. The proposal included the layoffs

of 330 cafeteria workers, cuts to a number of other popular programs and across-the-board increases in class size.

Zimmer's amendment was approved 7-0 and set a new deadline of March 13 for approving the \$6 billion budget. It also gives the district until March 8 to negotiate with United Teachers Los Angeles and other unions in an effort to avert thousands of potential layoffs through "shared sacrifices" such as salary give-backs or deferrals.

Finally, it directs Superintendent John Deasy to



one more blow would have been more than we



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assess whether the election in June, November or next March would be best time to ask voters to approve a \$298-a-year parcel tax.

The parcel tax needs the approval of two-thirds of the electorate and would raise an estimated \$200 million annually. District officials say its passage is essential to avoid making draconian cuts in programs.

The original budget proposal prompted UTLA members and adult and early-childhood education advocates to launch an orchestrated campaign that funneled thousands of phone calls and emails to school board members. As organizers presented the board with petitions bearing the signatures of 200,000 supporters, hundreds of protesters rallied outside waving signs and chanting "Save Adult Ed" and "Si, se puede" (Yes, we can).

Inside the board's meeting room, a raucous crowd cheered as speaker after speaker related how adult or early-childhood programs had made a difference in their lives.

Army Sgt. Anthony Fischetto, who stood out from the crowd in his dress uniform, described how classes at West Valley Occupational Center in Woodland Hills helped him earn his GED and put him on the road to success.

"In the Army, there is no such expression as, 'There's no other way,'" said Fischetto, of Simi Valley. "There is always another way.

Do whatever it takes to preserve adult education."

City Councilman Eric Garcetti, state Sen. Richard Alarcón and former City Councilwoman and

school board member Rita Walters were among the elected officials who also addressed the school board about the economic implications of ending job training as the region struggles to recover from the recession.



Advocates for LAUSD's Adult Ed and Early Childhood programs plan demonstration outside of LAUSD downtown Los Angeles headquarters advance of a school board vote that could gut those programs Tuesday, 14, 2012. (Hans Gutknecht/Staff Photographer)

The usually routine meetings saw a glimmer of star power as award-winning choreographer Debbie Allen and Guns N' Roses drummer Matt Sorum pleaded for the district to restore money for music and arts classes.

"Can't we work this thing out, rock star to superintendent?" Sorum asked Deasy, who lost his usual stoic expression and appeared a bit giddy at the offer.

Despite the palpable relief in the board room that the immediate crisis had been averted, board member Tamar Galatzan reminded the audience that tough decisions still must be





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made.

Los Angeles Unified has lost \$3 billion in state funding over the last four years, and the state still owes it \$1 billion for this year. That means the district has just \$353 million in the 2012-13 budget to fund discretionary programs like those slated for cuts on Tuesday.

"We need your help," Galatzan said. "Tell your legislators that education matters. Tell them what it means to you and your families.

They need to hear from you. The budget is in your hands right now."

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